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STATE FOR WHA/CEN  
NSC FOR DAN FISK

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/29/2018  
TAGS: PGOV KDEM SOCI HO  
SUBJECT: ZELAYA CALLS FOR POSTPONEMENT OF PRIMARY ELECTIONS

REF: A. TEGUC 970  
1B. STATE 114424  
1C. TEGUC 960

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reason 1.4 (B & D)

11. (C) Summary: President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya announced October 29 that he would call major political actors and civil society together in two meetings on October 30 to seek consensus to delay the November 16 election, due to flooding in the country. In addition, he announced that he would not allow the Honduran military to cease flood emergency work until November 12, effectively making it impossible for the military to support the November 16 elections. Sources tell us that the delay he seeks is one or two weeks. We recommend waiting to see the results of the consensus meeting before taking action. Our bottom line should be that any delay be supported by the major parties, that it be fully legal and constitutional and that it be short. End Summary

#### Background

12. (C) President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya asked for USG support to postpone the elections from the scheduled date of November 16 (Ref C). Ambassador received Department guidance (Ref B), which was delivered to Zelaya on October 27. Zelaya said that he continued to believe that the elections should be postponed but seemed to pull back from his original plan to postpone them based on our demarche (Ref A). Contradicting these statements in spirit, he interrupted regularly scheduled television at 3 a.m. on October 28 after a marathon cabinet meeting to express his opinion officially on the dire situation the country finds itself in and his reasons why he believed the elections should be postponed. He did, however, defer from taking any official steps to actually postpone the elections, saying that the decision was "out of his hands" and the responsibility of the "political classes." (Note: To postpone the elections we understand that he would have to obtain Congressional authorization for such an action. Specifically, the Congress requires a 2/3 vote to change the date of an election, which would be difficult to muster. In addition, according to the electoral reforms passed in December 2007, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal can postpone the elections for up to ten days in response to an act of nature/natural disaster. End Note.)

13. (C) The 3 a.m. press conference was replayed throughout the day on October 28, and the media and opposition groups

reacted venomously to the suggestion of a postponement. Zelaya left for Guatemala the same day, where he shot back calling all the politicians opposing his proposal "Caligula and Nero" and referring to President of the Congress Roberto Micheletti as a "Pharisee" because he had said that the "Constitution and the laws pertaining to the electoral processes should be respected." Zelaya also said that he would not allow the Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF) to leave their duties of disaster relief to attend to the elections. Chief of Defense Romeo Vasquez Velasquez somewhat contradicted the President by saying that although the Armed Forces were "tired" they could indeed carry out electoral support if instructed to do so. The TSE publicly stated that all the problems are manageable and that they were ready and able to conduct elections on November 16. The President then traveled to El Salvador for the SICA conference, where he took his declarations one step further, saying the HOAF do not have the operational capacity to fulfill the function of simultaneously continuing emergency relief operations and support to the electoral process of November 16. He said that in his capacity as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces he was instructing them to continue to conduct disaster relief operations. He said that he would seek to forge a consensus for his decision and planned to call for a meeting with the political parties at 10 a.m. on October 30 (which would be run by Minister to the Presidency Flores Lanza) and later at 2 p.m. with civil society representatives, which he would chair.

#### Mission Evaluation of the Situation on the Ground

¶4. (C) General consensus throughout Honduras has been that USG response to emergency flooding has been immediate and comprehensive. Political leadership and press in Honduras have uniformly lauded U.S. responsiveness, while adding that Chavez and Venezuela have done nothing. The USG has provided approximately USD 400k in relief supplies since disaster declaration on October 15. All reports note that supplies are reaching the most vulnerable populations in a timely manner. OFDA Director for Latin America, USAID Mission Director in Honduras, and NGO partners all consider the current situation manageable and under control. In addition, Director of the Honduran Disaster Relief Agency (COPECO) Marcos Burgos and other high COPECO officials have all commented to OFDA and AID officers that they also consider the current situation under control, although Burgos backed off this position during the October 24 meeting with the Ambassador in Zelaya's presence.

#### Developments in and Assessment of HOAF

¶5. (C) Sources tell us that at 1500 local on October 29, the HOAF leadership met with Honduran President Mel Zelaya and briefed that they would need a minimum of eight days to prep for the primary elections scheduled for November 16. President Zelaya reiterated that the HOAF is under the operational control of COPECO until November 12. The HOAF and the President agreed that the elections, if delayed, should not occur after November 30. Furthermore, if the weather improved and the situation did not require further involvement of the HOAF, operational control could end earlier than November 12. These decisions though, are not the HOAF's to make and our sources tell us that date was picked unilaterally by the president.

¶6. (C) The HOAF has been substantially engaged in the response to Tropical Depression 16. They have limited Command, Control, and Communication capabilities, and limited logistical capability. The eight day estimate needed for election prep is valid. Given the current climatic conditions, the HOAF is capable of supporting the elections as currently scheduled, unless they are ordered to continue with the recuperation phase of disaster management. General Vasquez, has indicated that he will continue to support Zelaya and would support the case that the HOAF can not simultaneously conduct election support and disaster response.

¶7. (C) Micheletti told the Ambassador that he did not agree

with the delay; however he believes it wise to allow consensus meetings to play out tomorrow. Ultimately, he said he would not let the President run roughshod of the constitution.

¶8. (C) Comment and recommendation: Though clumsy and brutish, this is Zelaya's attempt to forge consensus to move the primary election. It is in our interest to have the primary as soon as possible as it begins the election cycle and provides as with two legitimate candidates, moving Zelaya into lame duck status and marking the beginning of the end of his administration. Zelaya knows this; it is in his interest to delay the primary. Nevertheless we certainly do not want to get ahead of the major political actors in the country, since it is possible that they will agree to a short delay if the president makes a good case. In fact, National Party leader Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo told the Ambassador that rather than precipitate a major political confrontation they are considering supporting a congressionally approved constitutional, short delay of several weeks. This is consistent with our bottom line that if there is consensus for a move, it must be fully legal and constitutional and must be short. Zelaya told us in Ref A that a delay until December 7 would work for him, although there is talk that the postponement would be until November 30. Beyond making calls to the major political party actors to reiterate our position, which we have done, we recommend that we wait to see the results of tomorrow's consensus meetings before taking further action.

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